

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

**JEFF L SMITH**  
Claimant

**ROGNES CORP**  
Employer

**APPEAL 19A-UI-00884-DG-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 12/30/18**  
**Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge/Misconduct  
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) – Absenteeism  
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Claimant filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated January 28, 2019, (reference 01) that held claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on February 14, 2019. Claimant participated personally and was represented by Jim Hamilton, Hearing Representative. Employer participated by Warren Rognes, President. Employer's Exhibits 1-3 were admitted into evidence.

**ISSUES:**

Did the claimant quit the employment without good cause attributable to the employer or was he discharged for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant last worked for employer on December 26, 2018. Employer discharged claimant on January 2, 2019, because claimant violated employer's attendance policy.

Claimant began working for employer as a construction foreman on January 25, 2016. Claimant had the authority to call off work and notify his employees there would be no work when it rained, or if there were other issues related to the weather. The final absence occurred on January 2, 2019, when the claimant did not come into work because he believed he was on vacation and that he was not scheduled to work. Claimant notified employer that he was taking time off to help care for his special needs grandchild beginning on December 26, 2018 through January 4, 2019. There was no work available for claimant on December 27 and December 28, 2018 because it rained and the work-site was closed down.

Claimant had no other instances of absenteeism or warnings for violating employer's attendance policy. Claimant did not know that his employment was in jeopardy of termination prior to the date of separation.

## REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

Since the claimant did not have three consecutive no-call/no-show absences as required by the rule in order to consider the separation job abandonment, the separation was a discharge and not a quit.

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

2. *Discharge for misconduct.* If the department finds that the individual has been discharged for misconduct in connection with the individual's employment:

a. The individual shall be disqualified for benefits until the individual has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the individual's weekly benefit amount, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) provides:

**(7) Excessive unexcused absenteeism.** Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer.

The employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988). The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. *Lee v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct **except for illness or other reasonable grounds** for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) (emphasis added); see *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 190, n. 1 (Iowa 1984) holding "rule [2]4.32(7)...accurately states the law." The requirements for a finding of misconduct based on absences are therefore twofold. First, the absences must be excessive. *Sallis v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. *Higgins* at 192. Second, the absences must be unexcused. *Cosper* at 10. The requirement of "unexcused" can be satisfied in two ways. An absence can be unexcused either because it was not for "reasonable grounds," *Higgins* at 191, or because it was not "properly reported," holding excused absences are those "with appropriate notice." *Cosper* at 10. The term "absenteeism" also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as "tardiness." An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. *Higgins, supra*. However, a good faith inability to obtain childcare for a sick infant may be excused. *McCourtney v. Imprimis Tech., Inc.*, 465 N.W.2d 721 (Minn. Ct. App. 1991). See, *Gimbel v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 489 N.W.2d 36 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992) where a claimant's late call to the employer was justified because the claimant, who was suffering from an asthma attack, was physically unable to call the employer until the condition sufficiently improved; and *Roberts v.*

*Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 356 N.W.2d 218 (Iowa 1984) where unreported absences are not misconduct if the failure to report is caused by mental incapacity.

It is the duty of the administrative law judge as the trier of fact in this case, to determine the credibility of witnesses, weigh the evidence and decide the facts in issue. *Arndt v. City of LeClaire*, 728 N.W.2d 389, 394-395 (Iowa 2007). The administrative law judge may believe all, part or none of any witness's testimony. *State v. Holtz*, 548 N.W.2d 162, 163 (Iowa App. 1996). In assessing the credibility of witnesses, the administrative law judge should consider the evidence using his or her own observations, common sense and experience. *Id.* In determining the facts, and deciding what testimony to believe, the fact finder may consider the following factors: whether the testimony is reasonable and consistent with other believable evidence; whether a witness has made inconsistent statements; the witness's appearance, conduct, age, intelligence, memory and knowledge of the facts; and the witness's interest in the trial, their motive, candor, bias and prejudice. *Id.*

Inasmuch as employer had not previously warned claimant about the issue leading to the separation, it has not met the burden of proof to establish that claimant acted deliberately or with recurrent negligence in violation of company policy, procedure, or prior warning. An employee is entitled to fair warning that the employer will no longer tolerate certain performance and conduct. Without fair warning, an employee has no reasonable way of knowing that there are changes that need be made in order to preserve the employment. If an employer expects an employee to conform to certain expectations or face discharge, appropriate (preferably written), detailed, and reasonable notice should be given. Verbal reminders or routine evaluations are not warnings.

The employer has not established that claimant had excessive absences which would be considered unexcused for purposes of unemployment insurance eligibility. Because his last absence was related to properly reported request for time off or other reasonable grounds, no final or current incident of unexcused absenteeism occurred which establishes work-connected misconduct. Since the employer has not established a current or final act of misconduct, and, without such, the history of other incidents need not be examined. Accordingly, benefits are allowed.

#### **DECISION:**

The January 28, 2019, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible. The benefits withheld based upon this separation shall be paid to claimant.

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Duane L. Golden  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

dlg/scn